MARKET CROSS, SOMERTON.

A few weeks back, we presented our readers with a view of that bold and somewhat singular structure, the Church of Somerton; we this week bring forward the ancient Market Cross, and a group of companion buildings, with which it is so happily associated. Strange to say, that in all the itineraries into which we have searched, we can find no account of this interesting relic. Is it that Somersetshire is so rich in those of a superior class as to deny to the antiquary and the archæologist leisure for a passing review of this? Crosses and churches of matchless beauty and elegance, we know the country abounds in; in fact it may be termed, if not the "classic land" of English art, that of its congregated excellencies; and we do not think this specimen of the market cross the least worthy of note and illustration.

HISTORICAL MEMORANDA RESPECTING BRICKS AND BRICKLAYING.

BY JAMES WYLSON, HON. SEC. R.A.A.D.

The Bricklayers of London are, by a charter granted in 1568, a corporate company, consisting of a master, two wardens, twenty assistants, and seventy-eight livery. Their art is that of erecting (with mortar or cement as a necessary auxiliary) edifices, or minor works of a similar nature, with bricks, which are artificial stones, whose figure is a rectangular parallelopiped of long and flat proportions, uniform in shape and dimensions; their size is regulated in its limits by the duty which has been imposed from time to time by Act of Parliament since the first levy in 1784. The impost at the present time is five shillings for British, and ten shillings for foreign per mille, payable by the maker, on such bricks as do not exceed 10 inches in length, by 5 wide and 3 thick: on other sorts it is 7s. 6d. and 15s. The size mentioned is that of the mould inside, and consequently of the bricks when newly made; that being their condition when they come under the cognizance of the excise officers, whose duty it is to take accurate account of the quantities previous to their being burnt. Their dimensions, after that operation, are about 9 in. by 4½ by 2½, varying a little according to the materials of which they are composed; the magnitude of those manufactured in the neighbourhood of London being generally a fraction less, particularly in the length, the shrinkage being most in the greatest dimension.

On reference to the sacred records, we find that the use of brick has arisen in very primeval times; the city of Babel, the earliest in our ancient history, having been built of it. If, however, we set aside the testimony offered by these writings, the pyramid of unburnt brick, which modern travellers describe as still existing at Sakhara, and occupying an area of upwards of 30,000 square feet, affords a sufficient mass of evidence in support of its high antiquity. Turning to the favoured cities of Athens and Rome, we trace that even in the Pentelican temples of the former, the application of this homely material to interior work was not rejected; while among the proud remains of the latter, external and even carved works still present themselves; as is also the case to a much greater extent at Pompeii, where the facilities for building in stone were of an inferior order.

The similarity between these ornamental works at Rome, and the fine old Italian specimens of moulded brickwork which are extant in England, naturally suggests the idea that it is to Italy we are indebted for the degree of excellence which it attained in this country; and probably the inference is fair and correct; and it is curious that when we seek the origin of the use of brick, in its more ordinary form, in our island, we are carried back to a period at which no other conclusion seems tenable, than that we owed its first introduction to the same source; for it is in the scattered remains of the Roman boundary walls that our earliest examples are found; and although there is a shade of probability that the inhabitants had, prior to the inroads of that people, something of a rude description bearing an analogy to brickwork, yet its utter absence among the well-scanned remnants of past ages must discountenance any hypothesis that would confer on it aught of a higher character than mere perishable clod-work; such as that in which the peasant of Ireland and mountaineer of Scotland construct their huts and hovels in the present day.

Although so much of the rudiments of art has been transmitted to us from the ancient Egyptians, it is generally thought that there is not evidence to justify the assumption that their knowledge in this branch extended to the important operation of burning; and the circumstances of those magnificent yet mournful memorials which now tell the tale of their once wondrous greatness, being almost all of granite or other stone, sufficiently accounts for their not excelling in a manufacture for which they had not extreme occasion. If they ever did possess that art, however, certain it is that now there is no vestige of it visible, either in the mighty monuments of the past, or the mean and short-lived fabrics of the present.

The ancient Babylonian and Persian, as well as Roman remains, exhibit both sun-baked and kiln-burnt bricks, the former being in the east, where rain is unfrequent, and they undergo the action of a very powerful solar heat, found to be not only sufficient for general purposes, but even of a ringing hardness; respecting those in Greece, we are uncertain whether they were burnt or merely dried, but the presumption, on considering the nature of its relations, is in favour of the former.

The Babylonian bricks are objects of curiosity and interest, on account of the Chaldean characters which are inscribed on them; those of the burnt description are of good quality, varying in form, size, and colour, some being of long proportions, about a foot in length, and three to four inches thick, others about a foot and a half square and of similar thickness: their hues are similar to the red and yellow, so familiar here; they are usually built with coarse lime or with bitumen, but sometimes only with clay, and the work is bonded together by layers of reeds, which in Babylon are frequently found introduced to every course, but in other parts to about every sixth or eighth; according to Herodotus, the Grecian historian, they were placed to every thirtieth course.

The Persian sun-dried bricks of modern times are described as being made of tempered

For more information on OCR and PDF Compression, visit our website